

Crank Up The Heat. It's White Bass Season.

By Steve Welch

Any fishing guide that wants to make a living at the sport he loves needs a summer species to target. Lake Shelbyville has such that specie the hard fighting tasty white bass. No limit and fisheries biologist asks you to take as many as you can handle. I clean about 150 every day and never make a dent in the population.

Lake Shelbyville has to be one of the best white bass lakes in the entire Midwest. I know it is the best white bass lake in Illinois. Carlyle might try and make that claim but Shelbyville has so many good ledge spots and areas to get out of the wind. Carlyle is known for its small fish on the lake and hard to get to fish up in the rivers due to all the stumps.

July's heat really gets the white bass going. We scan the horizon for busting fish since we now have our first shad spawn and the white bass can't get their fill and stay up on the surface just ripping them up for hours. For those that have never been in five acres of hundreds of thousands feeding white bass it is a ball. You can throw any bait you want and they will just hammer it and make you think you have hung into a twenty pound fish. White bass on light tackle pound for pound are as hard a fighting fish out there.

This is why I encourage folks to bring the kids. You can flat out spoil them for life on white bass. Tons of action and they get to do battle with as hard a fighter as they can handle.

Once we get into mid month and the heat really gets hot the fish drop back to deep river channel ledges and then they push the bait against the side of a sheer river channel drop and then you can get into a school that will remain in the same area for two months and we harvest about five thousand fish from that same school and never put a dent in it. This is when my candy striper lures just out fishes everything I have ever tried.

This lure has a blade on the back that is an inline blade so it will turn at very slow speeds. When you fish it on a ledge you place your boat out in deep water and throw it up on top the ledge. Then you simply pop it off bottom and let it fall back to the bottom. This allows the bait to fall on its nose and the rear blade just spins and the white bass will hit it several times before one gets it. You can feel fish slam it and pull it away from the smaller ones. Once you catch one just repeat that same cast by watching the horizon to line up on and make that cast over and over again. Then encourage the rest of the anglers to do the same. This gets the school fired up and they then start competing for the bait and then everyone will get in on the action. They are so competitive that they can't stand another fish having bait and will frequently follow a hooked fish to the surface.

One of the neat things about white bass fishing is all the other predator fish that follow them all summer. I can catch huge channel catfish, buffalo and walleye under these busting white bass. They simply hang out on the bottom and take any shad sinking to the bottom that the white bass miss. I tend to fish under the white bass and let the clients catch all the fish for the cooler. I always get my hands on a twenty-pound plus buffalo or channel catfish and then hand the pole to a young angler and let them fight the fish in. Most of the time the biggest fish they have ever caught. They go home with all kinds of stories that they will never forget. This is truly why one becomes a guide. Not all the fishing time you get but the memories of those you helped and kids are truly god's greatest achievement.

I know a lot of other species become hard to catch during the summer. Crappies tend to roam out in deep basins as huge schools looking for shad. Bass just disappear as do walleye for the most part but white bass love the heat and August can be just as good as July.

Another fun summer activity is my buffalo fishing. I have been asked many times to do fishing show on how to catch these fish and last summer we did one. Once the summer thermocline gets

set up all the fish are deep. I can see the larger images on my depthfinder indicating huge buffalo. We then drop a slab spoon and a teaser hook tied above it down into the school and radically pop it off bottom and let it freefall back. The buffalo think it is a wounded baitfish and will simply nail this bait or you will snag one when you pop it off bottom. Then the fight is on. A twenty to thirty pound buffalo extremely unhappy especially if you get him snagged towards the tail. These fish will charge to the surface and jump two-feet and rip off a hundred yards of line. We typically catch twenty or more and it makes for a tiring day believe me.

So come on out and give this summer fishing a try and why not give my guide service a buzz and we will make some memories.